Short Term Paper #1

Mekayla Robinson

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**Question: Did contact with the U.S. benefit Japan anytime between the years 1750 and 1900?**

**Answer:** Relations between the United States and Japan started back in eighteenth century. The two countries shared total different cultural settings and social environment. Before Japan’s contact with the United States, the Japanese maintained a culture of extreme isolation. The pattern of their development remained state-oriented and was based on traditional methods. During the Edo period (17th century) in Japan, the peasants used to produce meals just for the consumption of family. They used to consume what all they produced and their living standards remained at subsistence level. Before Japanese interaction with the United States, the Japanese were living in the Middle Edo period. The trade was just limited to producing wheat, rice and other organic crops. Japanese used to grow these crops and sell them for meeting their substantial needs. However, during the end of this period, they started trading at commercial level. Since the culture of isolation in Japan was influenced by nothing rather by their domestic conditions, therefore, Japanese remain hesitant in interacting with foreigners.

During the end of the eighteenth century, Japanese, however, introduced some reforms in land acquisition and trade. These reforms included providing specific area of land to a particular farmer and binding them to present their products to a state representative [[1]](#footnote-1). This was the time the foreign ships including Chinese and Americans started to approach the Japanese mainland. The Japanese emperor considered it useless to have even a slight talk with the foreigners who used to travel from many long. The United States, however, maintained a coercive strategy in dealing with Japanese. Such methods of United States forced Japanese to sign friendship treaties not only with the American but with many Europeans and Chinese too. It was in the nineteenth century that bakafu government in Japan showed interest in signing formal commercial treaties which could benefit Japan. Bakafu government went on to build these ties with external powers without the permission of their emperor.

# Interaction with the United States

There is no second opinion in the fact that Japan was able to industrialize with interacting with external powers. The Tokugawa Shougnate which reigned over Japan for around three centuries. In between 1750 and 1900, Japan’s interaction with the United States helped them in acquiring new technologies, adopting new methods of education and implementing a new trade and legal systems[[2]](#footnote-2). Some Japanese at the higher positions were inspired by the industrialization in America and for such reason, thy expanded their raw material export to America. As the trade relations became stronger with America, many Japanese moved toward cities (the trade hubs) at that time. This movement from rural areas toward trading hubs provide the farmers at the rural areas to acquire more and more land. The acquisition of more land offered expanded growth and the domestic production started achieving new heights. However, Japanese remained slightly failed in managing the poor class, which gradually increased.

Some also believe that after the formal end of the Perry period (1894) in Japan, it became formally opened to the outside world. Its growth in agriculture, however, faced serious setback from the Sino- Japanese war, but from that time onwards, Japanese focused on improving ties with Westerns and started acquiring proto-industrial bases[[3]](#footnote-3). In 1850’s when United States came much closer to Japan, it helped Japan in achieving Urbanization, road networks and rice cultivation. These were initial interactions between Americans and Japanese. With the development of cities like Osaka and Edo (Tokyo) and with the diffusion of the rural areas, Japanese started focusing on industrial betterment. The industries set up earlier were meant to back up the Japanese agricultural growth which later n expanded to include the production of locally consumed goods. Japanese then accepted new technologies being offered by the United States in producing energy and generating steam power. Lastly, in between 1880s and 190s, Americans helped Japanese in infrastructure development and expansion in manufacturing.

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1. Robert W. Strayer and Eric W. Nelson, *Ways of the World: A Brief Global History with Sources (Volume 2, Since the Fifteenth* (Bedford/St. Martins, 2016), 937. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Strayer and Nelson, 938. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. “Foreign Relations in Early Modern Japan: Exploding the Myth of National Seclusion | Nippon.Com,” accessed September 21, 2019, https://www.nippon.com/en/features/c00104/foreign-relations-in-early-modern-japan-exploding-the-myth-of-national-seclusion.html. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)